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## Rhode Island Telecommunications Educational Access Fund Bandwidth Upgrade FAQ's

### How will RIDE make decisions concerning the line allocations it will make to a district, school, or library within the RITEAF program?

Line allocations to eligible sites are determined by:

- A request submitted by K12 public or private schools and libraries to address educational or public library purposes.
- The purpose of accessing the Internet. (The RITEAF legislation stipulates that lines acquired for schools provide access to the Internet. Issues related to phone systems, for example, are not relevant and will not be considered.)
- Line capacity requests that are appropriate for the demonstrated need and usefulness to the eligible location.
- The eligible site establishes ERATE eligibility and submits a timely Technology Plan that addresses SLD / RIDE planning requirements.

### What determines the capacity (size or bandwidth) of lines that RIDE allocates to the eligible entities (Districts / Schools / Library) in the RITEAF program? Is there a baseline allocation for every school or library?

RIDE established the following minimum award goal of:

- Elementary – 50 Mb
- Middle - 100 Mb
- High School - 200Mb
- Direct connect locations including private, parochial, libraries, etc. - Determined on individual basis and based on need

### Is there any limitation to line allocations that we can request? If so, why?

Program funding is limited and must be fairly distributed, addressing the needs of public and private schools as well as libraries. Consideration of more needy schools and/or libraries should be a factor as RIDE awards lines. The source of RITEAF funds is a fee imposed on *land*-line phone bills in R.I. This fee has not been increased since the program's inception in 2004, during which time the number of land-lines has dropped as cellular phone technology has increased.

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Other factors determining the amount of RITEAF funding available have been favorable, temporarily balancing the large losses of land-lines:

- a) RI's discount level (based on poverty) has increased somewhat increasing the E-Rate matching award that RI receives;
- b) The costs for lines have dropped as a result of competitive bidding and successful negotiations with vendors;
- c) The introduction of cloud networking has yielded benefits to participating districts.

But, these favorable influences on the fund are finite. School discounts will level off or reverse direction, while vendor costs cannot continue to fall. Without an increase in the fees collected from the RITEAF program on phone lines (or the inclusion of cell phones), there must be limits placed on the lines awarded to schools and libraries.

### **Who makes the decision on line size, and what's the basis?**

RIDE has the authority, based in the RITEAF legislation, to establish the award process. The size of the line allocated to each school or library is reflected by the entities' need as demonstrated by enrollment data, the school Technology Plan, and usage monitoring performed on behalf of the Department. School or libraries should expect to have their requests for services tested for reasonableness by RIDE.

### **How long must we live with the line award allocation made in December of each year? What happens if we need a quick increase in line capacity for a project we never anticipated?**

It is useful to remember that the RITEAF program depends on the E-Rate program's matching dollars to achieve its remarkable achievement of fulfilling school and library needs. The E-Rate fraction of the match is approximately 60%, with the state's fraction at 40% in the recent year.

Awards to schools and libraries are only possible if the corresponding E-Rate match has been requested in that program. A line award change at any other time of the year would not have the benefit of matching E-Rate dollars and would therefore reduce any unspent funds in the RITEAF program at more than double the expected cost. This is not prudent fund management and requests made outside of the program cycle will not be accommodated.

Schools and libraries can however reach out to their current vendor to seek immediate relief to increase their award lines. Vendors have agreed to allow for wireless on a need by need basis with the understanding the cost differential will be billed directly to the user and not RIDE.